

Poverty, migration, and coping strategies: an introduction

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Formal and informal social security

Many highly developed Western welfare states witness recurrent concern about social security recipients who earn a bit on the side in the informal economy. Research has recently been conducted on this in the Netherlands. Interviewees rang the bells of the unemployed, social security recipients and the disabled to ask whether they ever broke the rules. The results were striking:

“The study shows that 23% of the social security recipients who were interviewed had done odd jobs for money in the past year without informing the Welfare Department. No fewer than 14% of the disabled had done odd jobs without informing the agency they were receiving their benefits from. The same held true for 17% of the unemployed. In addition, 12% of the social security recipients who were interviewed worked off the books last year. The same held true for 7% of the unemployed and 6% of the disabled. In the year 2000 14% of the unemployed and the social security recipients failed to accept offers of appropriate employment on one or more occasions and deliberately saw to it that they were not hired”.¹

These results are in keeping with other research findings that show that quite a few social security recipients prefer the direct security of their benefits supplemented by small informal earnings to an uncertain future of paid employment (see the article by Engbersen and Staring in this issue). Policy-makers however

tend to find this kind of conduct a cause for concern. In response to the study referred to above, the Dutch Minister of Social Affairs stated that extra measures were called for “to deal more effectively with violations of the social security rules and fraud”.²

From a policy perspective, these activities on the part of social security recipients are classified and condemned as fraud. From a social science perspective, there is another way of looking at the issue of people on unemployment or other benefits doing odd jobs on the side. We argue here that individuals and households in a marginal socioeconomic position have always developed certain strategies to meet their basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) and not fall too far below the prevailing conditions in their society. We refer in this connection to coping strategies. The rise of welfare states and formal systems of social security do not in any way mean the disappearance of these coping strategies on the part of marginalized households. It would be more accurate to say that formal social security and informal coping strategies exist side by side in the developed welfare states and a combination of the two is used.

References are made in this connection to formal versus informal social security (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 2000). If we refer to ‘social security’ in Western countries, we are usually talking about the formal system of social security, in other words the entire body of public provisions organized by the State and designed to meet people’s basic requirements in times of need (illness, unem-

ployment, divorce and so forth). It is only within this formal system of social provisions that the issue of breaking the social security rules has even come up at all. Comparative research has demonstrated however to what a limited extent social security can be equated with formal provisions. After all, in countries where public social security provisions are marginal or non-existent, there are other social institutions and provisions that give a certain level of protection in the event of poverty and the inability to earn a living for whatever reason. People help each other and exchange goods and services, relatives provide a certain extent of assistance, and there is the material support provided by local authorities or private charity agencies - nowadays often international donors - and informal economic activities and so forth. Individuals or groups often move in an effort to meet with their material needs, which is why separate attention is focused in this issue on migration as coping strategy. In many Third World countries, the 'traditional' or 'informal' forms of social security are a functional alternative as it were for the formal provisions of the Western welfare states. Even if there is a certain amount of government aid for the poor, the public care is frequently only a small part of the social security mix people come to depend on.

What is more, it would be erroneous to assume that informal protective arrangements only exist in non-Western countries or that Western countries only have formal or institutionalized social security. General dichotomies of this kind such as modern versus traditional or formal versus informal only serve as obstacles to a proper understanding of social phenomena. Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann, whom we have derived this notion of formal and informal social security from, argue that even within the framework of modern welfare states, informal or traditional forms of social security have not completely disappeared.

“Moreover, social security in contemporary

welfare states is not adequately characterized by its state-regulated and specialized social security institutions. For other relationships based on kinship, friendship and patronage, though changed, have not disappeared. Rather than with simple opposite types of social security organization, we are faced with different degrees of complexity and plurality in the social organization of social security” (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 2000: 19).

Their argument exhibits a certain parallel with the study on informal labor. Attention began to be focused on this phenomenon in the context of Third World studies, where authors initially worked from the erroneous assumption that in the Western world with its strongly regulated and formalized labor market, there was no such thing as informal labor (cf. in this connection Hart 1975; Kloosterman et al. 1997: 17).

The fact that formal social security and informal earnings can exist side by side in a modern welfare state is clearly demonstrated in the recent study by Edin and Lein (1997) on how American single mothers can survive on an AFDC-benefit (Aid for Families with Dependent Children) or a poorly paid job.³ Although the level of the social security benefits in the United States is undeniably lower than in the welfare states of Western Europe, it is still a modern welfare state. Based on extensive interviews with single mothers, Edin and Lein demonstrate that there is no way they can make ends meet with the scanty social security benefits they receive. This is even more true of mothers who try to combine a poorly paid job with taking care of their children. For this group of poorly qualified women, paid employment is barely worth the trouble, certainly if they have to pay separately for childcare. The women in Edin and Lein's study can not manage without the informal support of third parties or their earnings from paid employment. The most important sources of support for these single mothers are their own

mothers or other relatives. It is clear from the article by Ypeij and Steenbeek in this issue that the same holds true for single mothers in the Netherlands. Men, either their present partners or the absent fathers of their children, are the second source of support for the single mothers in the study by Edin and Lein. The mothers' present boyfriends often live with them, but only in so far as they make a financial contribution to the family budget: "Men who don't pay can't stay". The financial contributions of absent fathers are only relevant for working mothers or if they are given informally. Women with a social security benefit (AFDC) can only keep a small part of the child support, the rest is deducted from their benefit. Women who can not generate enough funds from their personal networks try to earn an extra income via formal or informal employment: part-time jobs, working after hours or off the books or in the underground economy in petty crime or prostitution.

What has been said above enables us to draw a few conclusions that are relevant to the further discussion on coping strategies. Firstly, there is no strict division separating the world of formal social security from the world of coping strategies. Coping strategies such as mutual social support and earning a bit on the side are used and are sometimes even necessary in a context of formal social security. This is the case in the United States and is also applicable - as is clear from the articles by Engbersen and Staring and Ypeij and Steenbeek in this journal - in countries with a much higher benefit facility level such as the Netherlands.

Secondly, Edin and Lein's analysis is interesting because it grants insight into the issue of whether breaking the rules is part of these coping strategies. This is not a simple black-and-white issue. Whether or not rules have been broken does not merely depend on the nature of the activity itself, it depends far more on the specific position and legal status of the person engaged in the activity and the legal context the activities are being conducted in. A working single mother can earn some extra

income in a completely legal fashion by working overtime, but for single mothers on social security, this is formally prohibited. People on social security can receive financial support, for example from their relatives, but if this support is given by the absent father, it is formally classified as child support and is deducted from the benefit. This is why many single mothers on AFDC prefer not to inform the social services agency about whatever financial support they might be receiving from the fathers of their children; it would be viewed as informal child support and thus as a violation of the rules. So it might be wiser to speak of coping strategies that vary in the degree to which the rules are broken and the extent to which they are beyond the scope of official supervision. As regards this point, there is a parallel between the study of coping strategies and research into informal labor. Various researchers have made it clear that it is unfeasible to draw a distinction in a general sense between formal and informal labor. This too after all depends on the context an activity takes place in and the rules and regulations that are valid there. This is why the informal economy is often pragmatically defined as all the economic activities that in one way or another violate the existing legislation and regulations in a country (cf. Castells and Portes 1989, Roberts 1994, Kloosterman et al. 1997).

As to whether coping strategies are accompanied by violations of the rules, the differences are especially sizeable between people who are formally employed and social security recipients. Life on a benefit is generally subject to the most rules and restrictions. People with a formal but poorly paid job can earn an extra income without any problem by simply working overtime or moonlighting. Social security recipients however are usually not allowed to engage in any formal labor, at any rate whatever income they might earn via this labor is deducted from their benefit so there is no financial advantage to it. This too differs from one type of benefit to another. In the Netherlands, for instance, you are not al-

lowed to earn an extra income with a social security benefit (means tested), but you can do so with a disability benefit (not means tested). This all illustrates that in addition to advantages, formal social security also has disadvantages. Obviously the most important advantage of formal social security is that in times of need, it gives people a minimum and sometimes a more generous income. The most important disadvantage of formal social security is however that it forces people to live according to a set of rules that strongly limits their opportunities to seek their own solutions to their material problems:

“Accessing social rights may have negative implications for the degree of control that households exercise over their environment, by making them dependent clients of bureaucracies” (Roberts 1991: 137).

There is thus friction as it were between the limited public provisions and ample individual activities of households in an effort to survive materially on the one hand and social rights but at the same time people’s increasing dependence (and perhaps as unintentional effect their resorting to coping strategies that violate the valid legislation and regulations) on the other.

Poverty and coping strategies

Definitions of coping strategies

If research is to be conducted into household coping strategies, it means abandoning all too determinist or structuralist concepts of social reality that were long commonly accepted in the social sciences such as structuralism, Marxism and so forth. In concepts of this kind, individuals are often portrayed as completely determined by structural constraints that have gradually emerged in the course of history. Similarly in research on poverty, which occupies a central position in this special issue, poor households are all too frequently pre-

sent as passive victims of economic and political circumstances and developments. Poverty is viewed as something that happens to people that they do not exert any influence on. Research into coping strategies however works from the assumption that people are active agents who have a certain freedom of choice and action (cf. Giddens 1984, Long 1992). No matter how limited their leeway sometimes might be, human conduct is never completely pre-structured by the circumstances. To a certain extent, poor households are free to opt for strategies that produce good or bad results. As González de la Rocha notes in *The resources of poverty: women and survival in a Mexican city*, there are always more effective and less effective ways of dealing with financial scarcity, ways that have to be tried out, acquired, adjusted and improved: “...denying the existence of strategies is equivalent to saying that poverty determines the lives of the poor in such a way that their courses of action are given” (González de la Rocha 1994: 13).

More generally, Roberts is of the opinion that the focus on coping strategies emphasizes the freedom of choice people always have within the social, economic and political conditions they are confronted with:

“Attributing strategies to people, whether as individuals, as households, or as interest groups, signals that despite the importance of structural constraints choice is possible, and that the exercise of choice can result in alternative outcomes” (1991: 38).

The literature features any number of definitions of survival strategies, household strategies or coping strategies (cf. Caplowitz 1979, Mingione 1987, Roberts 1991, Sansone 1992, Snel and Engbersen 1996). We use the term coping strategies here to refer to all the strategically selected acts that individuals and households in a poor socioeconomic position use to restrict their expenses or earn some extra income to enable them to pay for the basic

necessities (food, clothing, shelter) and not fall too far below their society's level of welfare. Coping strategies are thus series of strategic acts based on a conscious assessment of alternative plans of action. Within the limited options they sometimes have, households in a poor socioeconomic position choose the plans of action that are proportionately the most useful to them. This does not necessarily mean these plans of action always serve the purpose they were intended to serve. In fact a central point in our article is the unintentional results of coping strategies that only perpetuate the poor socioeconomic position of some households.

As is noted above we use the term coping strategies rather than survival strategies because for various reasons it can be misleading. In the context of Third World economies, the term survival strategies is misleading because it suggests that coping strategies can enable individuals and households to escape poverty. In the context of the highly developed welfare states all the articles in this issue pertain to, the term is however misleading for quite different reasons. After all, the direct survival of poor households is not generally at risk in these societies.

The term coping is mainly used in the field of psychology, and a distinction is drawn there between coping with problems and coping with emotions. Coping with problems involves efforts on the part of individuals to solve situations they perceive as problematic. Coping with emotions has to do with the efforts individuals make to reduce or avoid the mental stress generated by problematic situations. Of course in the long run, solving problems is the best way to reduce or avoid tension. However, people are not always in a position to solve their problems. If they aren't, coping with emotions, for example by seeking a distraction or talking about problems, can be useful and help keep the mental stress generated by the problem under control.

Although most of the articles in this special section of *Focaal* pertain to coping with prob-

lems, coping with emotions is also relevant to how poor households deal with their poor socioeconomic position. A good illustration of how this mechanism works is given in a study on the issue of whether long-term unemployment leads to social isolation. The authors consider the question on the basis of the incongruence theory. The core of this approach is the assumption that people always try to avoid mental stress, e.g. by behavioral adaptations or cognitive tricks. Contact with employed people can often feel threatening to the long-term unemployed. This contact constantly reminds them of their own failure. This is why in the long run, the unemployed often tend to avoid contact with people with jobs and turn more and more to their own culture of unemployment. According to the author, this however has the unintentional result of making the unemployed lose contact with the world of paid employment altogether and only lengthens the distance to the labor market (Tazelaar and Sprengers 1984). Poverty studies also show evidence of some friction between coping with problems and coping with emotions. Poverty is a situation that causes friction to start with. If people are not capable of finding a way out of the poverty they find themselves in, they would at any rate benefit from being able to avoid or reduce the stress caused by the poverty. There are all kinds of distractions like shopping or going out. The problem however is that poor people often do not have the money to afford these distractions. The poor respondents nonetheless sometimes say that after years and years of counting every penny, they sometimes suddenly go wild and spend an unexpectedly large sum of money on something. They go out and buy or do something they have always been dreaming of - and then of course there are the bills to be paid (Van Nistelrooij 1998, Snel et al. 2001). Of course these are also examples of unintentional results of coping strategies.

Another important distinction pertaining to the coping strategies of poor households is drawn by Roberts (1991, 1994). He distin-

guishes between strategies focused on direct survival or making ends meet and strategies focused on long-term improvements (social mobility strategies). Survival strategies have to do with issues like living frugally, meeting their own needs, and earning a bit on the side so that an immediate financial improvement can be seen. Social mobility strategies however have to do with the large-scale projects in the histories of families and households, like making sure the children get a good education or making a regional or international move. According to Roberts, the immediate household survival strategies often reflect the values and common patterns of behavior of the local community the household is part of, whereas social mobility strategies are more geared towards the central values and usual paths to success in the larger society.

Here again, the unintentional effects of the behavior should however be noted. There can be quite a discrepancy between the direct coping strategies of households and their goal of improving their position in the long run. A family with children and limited financial means can decide that the children ought to earn their keep, which produces an immediate financial improvement, or that they should be enabled to complete their education, so that they can have a chance of a better future. This is a dilemma many parents in Third World countries are faced with. In discussions on informal labor in modern welfare states, references are also often made to the detrimental effects coping strategies can have. Unemployed people who live on a benefit and do not have much money can sometimes earn a bit on the side by working informally. In the long run though, it only has a detrimental effect on their life. The very fact that they engage in informal activities only takes them further away from the formal labor market and means they have even less of a chance of ever getting a formal job and being able to really improve their position.

For years, these detrimental effects of coping strategies have been a central theme in the

international academic debate on poverty. This debate goes back to Oscar Lewis' concept of the culture of poverty (1970; cf. Sansone 1992: 4-9). Whether they live in the Third World or in developed Western welfare states, poor people are thought to exhibit a number of typical patterns of behavior: low participation and integration in the most important institutions of society (especially the labor market), the sense of living outside society, and a strong orientation towards the family and the local society. It is typical of the culture of poverty that people are strongly focused on immediate survival in the present and do not devote much thought to long-term investments in the future. According to Lewis this is why these households can not manage to rise above their poverty and pass it on from one generation to the next. Particularly in the United States, these ideas have led to extremely conservative attitudes that view poverty more or less as resulting from the conduct of the poor themselves (blaming the victim) (cf. Murray 1984, Mead 1986). Other authors hold that the conduct of the poor is not so much the cause but the response to poverty (cf. Wilson 1991, 1996, Engbersen et al. 1993). It is still conceivable that this response and these ways of reacting to poverty can have the unintentional effect of perpetuating poverty. Sansone demonstrate in his study on the survival strategies of young Surinamese men in Amsterdam that as a result of how they act, their situation only gets worse. He refers to behavior (informal labor, criminal activities) that "... they think can contribute towards improving their position. The choices they make - no matter how rational they might be within a specific context - do not however always lead to the desired result" (Sansone 1992: 9).

Typology of coping strategies

Just exactly what kind of activities and household strategies are involved here? There are numerous classifications and typologies of coping strategies in the literature (cf. Caplo-

witz 1979, Mingione 1987, Roberts 1991 and 1994, Snel and Engbersen 1996, Ypeij and Snel 1999). Mingione (1987) draws a rough distinction between coping strategies focused on making better use of internal household resources and coping strategies focused on mobilizing external resources provided by the state, the local community, relatives, friends, private organizations such as the church and so forth. In both types of strategies, a distinction can then be drawn between monetary and non-monetary resources. Monetary resources include earnings from formal or informal labor or financial support provided by the local or national authorities. Non-monetary resources include activities by household members to meet their own needs, informal relations of mutual support or the exchange of services, and goods or services supplied by official agencies. We would like to specify four types of coping strategies used by poor households: limiting household expenses by consuming less or excluding non-productive members of the household; using internal household resources more intensively by meeting the household's own needs or establishing reciprocity relations within the informal social network; developing market strategies such as formal labor participation (if possible) or informal economic activities; and seeking the support of powerful external actors such as the state, local authorities or private organizations (cf. Roberts 1991: 141-42).

The first type of coping strategy entails limiting the household expenditures. This can be done in any number of ways: by consuming less, cutting down on expenditures perceived as luxuries (holidays, entertainment, transportation, the newspaper), or trying to maintain the same consumer level with less money by purchasing cheaper items. This is called 'price buying'. Price buying does save money, but it costs a great deal of time. People engage in time-consuming shopping trips to save a few dollars, they look at all the advertisements, go to the cheapest shops which are sometimes all the way across town, and to save money they

go on foot or by bike (Engbersen and Veen 1987: 14). The strategy of limiting expenditures is quick to reach its limitations. Firstly, this strategy is only feasible if there are still budget cuts to be made and the household has not yet reached the absolute minimum basic necessity level. Secondly, it is generally a women's strategy; in practice, having to make do with less money often means a strong intensification of the domestic labor of women and indeed of children as well.

A separate strategy for limiting household expenditures involves excluding non-productive members of the household from consuming. This too can occur in a number of ways varying from giving non-productive members of the household less to eat to actually having children placed outside the household. Steps of this kind can be referred to as strategic changes in the composition of the family household. They are deliberate changes in the composition of the household with the aim of cutting down on the costs of living or pooling various incomes within one household. These strategies are not solely used in Third World countries, there is also evidence of them in developed welfare states such as the Netherlands. Children from poor families might spend some time in the household of their grandmother for example, or various adults, each with an income of their own, might join to form a household (Van Walsum 2000, Ypeij and Snel 1999, 2000). As long as the aim is to save money, a change like this in the household composition can be viewed as a deliberate coping strategy on the part of the poor household.

The second kind of coping strategy has to do with more intensive use of internal household resources. A classical example is the self-supporting household that grows its own vegetables, makes its own clothes, does its own repairs or even builds its own house. References are often made to these forms of subsistence economy in literature on the Third World, but there is barely any mention of this coping strategy in literature on poverty in wel-

fare states as the Netherlands. Engbersen and Veen (1987), for instance, note that only very few of their long-term unemployed respondents have a vegetable garden and grow their own vegetables. There is no denying that in highly urbanized societies like the Dutch one, there are very few possibilities for activities of this kind.

Self-sufficiency is in Mingione's terminology an example of the use of non-monetary household resources. Entering into reciprocity relations within the circle of relatives, friends and neighbors is an example of the mobilization and utilization of external, non-monetary resources. Anthropologists and sociologists have conducted a great deal of research into the nature and dimensions of the informal social networks of various social categories. One of the constants in the research results has been that groups with a lower socioeconomic status (SES) frequently belong to smaller social networks than groups with a higher SES. Poverty is thus thought to be accompanied by diminished social contacts (Engbersen and Veen 1987, cf. Fischer 1982, Poel 1993). The nature of social networks is also thought to be different among groups with a lower SES; they have more contact with their relatives and local ties and fewer friends at a geographic or social distance. Qualitative research has however demonstrated how important informal social support is in helping poor households make ends meet. Many households feel and indeed actually are strongly supported by third parties, especially members of their own family. Sometimes poor households even have access to international support networks. There are strong ethnic and cultural differences in this connection though (cf. Stack 1974, Edin and Lein 1997, Staring 2001, Ypeij and Steenbeek in this issue).

Research has also demonstrated that there are not only advantages to informal support for poor households, to various extents it can also have hidden costs. One aspect of these costs is the dilemma of social exclusion from informal support relations: the same social

relations that create possibilities and provide support can lead to the exclusion of other individuals who have no access to this network of support. Another aspect is that informal support can be accompanied by increasing dependence and moral pressure. Particularly if the balance in reciprocal relations is disturbed - if one party systematically gives support and the other party receives it - giving support can be accompanied by implicit or explicit conditions. At the very least, the giver expects gratitude for the support he has given, and sometimes the giver expects the support recipient to behave 'decently' and more important, in accordance with the norms of the giver. The other way round, this moral pressure can be a reason for the support recipient to decide to do without the support altogether. People sometimes prefer to be poor and independent rather than rely on the paternalistic support of third parties (Sahlins 1972, Bourdieu 1990, Komter 1996, Portes 2000, Staring 2001). This dilemma of informal support and moral pressure is clearly described in this issue by Ypeij and Steenbeek in their article on the support networks of single mothers.

The third type of coping strategy pertains to market-oriented activities. Here again, a conglomerate of activities is involved varying from selling home-grown vegetables and other products at the market, as is quite common in Third World countries, to participating in the formal labor market or, if that is not feasible or lucrative, in the informal economy. In a general sense, in Mingione's terms what is involved here is the monetary utilization of the internal household resources, such as certain products and the available labor.

The question is to what extent formal labor should be viewed as a coping strategy. In first instance, this might seem odd. After all, if every formal job is a coping strategy, then the term is stretched to the very maximum. In certain conditions however, formal labor should indeed be viewed as a coping strategy of marginalized households, certainly if it supplements other strategies. There are for example the

second jobs of people with poorly paid first jobs or the part-time jobs of children from poor households. These are formal activities that do not violate any rules and supplement the precarious household income. If these same activities are engaged in by adult social security recipients, then they are violating the rules and the jobs thus constitute informal labor

The fourth and last type of coping strategy entails seeking the support of powerful external actors such as the state, local authorities or private organizations. In the context of highly developed Western welfare states, this type of coping strategy is by far the most important. After all, it is a characteristic feature of the welfare state that the state guarantees a minimum living for all its citizens. This is why marginalized households in Western societies often do not have to rely on coping strategies like meeting their own needs, helping each other or engaging in informal labor because they can rely on the benefits provided by the state. These countries have an extensive social security system that gives people a certain guarantee of income security in times of need, and in many cases there are also extra provisions for the most vulnerable groups. Examples of these special provisions include Medicaid and the food stamps in the United States, which are meant to provide the low-income groups with medical and health care and food. Ever since the mid-1990s when it was formally acknowledged that there is such a thing as poverty in the Netherlands, there has been an extensive packet of Dutch income-supportive measures for minimum income households such as rent subsidies, extra support for special expenditures of minimum income households, exemption from local taxes and so forth.

However, in connection with this strategy of seeking the support of external actors including the state, a distinction should be drawn between behavior that does and behavior that does not violate the rules. In the examples referred to above, the rules are not violated in any way. Marginalized households utilize the

provisions specifically designed for them. In addition however, there is the wrongful or improper use of these social provisions, which is somewhat euphemistically referred to as making advantageous arrangements (Köbben and Godschalk 1985). This includes pretending to adjust or even actually adjusting the household living situation in such a way that the maximum advantage can be taken of the available benefits. More concretely, this means keeping quiet about one's own earnings or the earnings of other members of the household, not informing the authorities that a couple is living together so as to keep receiving individual benefits, pretending to be living separately or even breaking off a relationship so as to receive two separate benefits.

Lastly, in addition to the official agencies, people in need can also turn to private organizations for support. In many Third World countries with only minimum state provisions for the poor, if any, private donor organizations (NGOs) still play a crucial role. From a historical perspective, the formal social security provisions in Western welfare states also developed from the activities private organizations, often churches, had been engaging in for much longer regarding the care of the poor and social support. Especially in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, these private care arrangements were increasingly formalized and institutionalized into the present-day systems of social security (De Swaan 1989). The question is whether this movement from private to public provisions is completely irreversible or whether in periods of economic crises or in times when official state agencies have the tendency to withdraw (retrenchment), the space and need might emerge for private forms of social support. Under the influence of the increasingly restrictive policy on asylum seekers, in the Netherlands various churches are taking a growing interest in the plight of individuals who were not granted asylum and as illegal immigrants no longer have any formal right to public provisions. In times of state retrenchment, new

forms of church support for the poor and the homeless also emerge.

The neighborhood as location for coping strategies

Central in this special issue are the coping strategies marginalized households use in an effort to preserve and if possible improve their material living conditions. There are however considerable differences as regards the spatial scale of these coping strategies. In some cases, the whole world is the spatial context where informal support relations and economic activities take place. References are made to transnational social networks within which informal solidarity and coping strategies are organized (cf. the articles by Engbersen and Silver). In other cases, the neighborhood people live in is also the spatial context they operate in. Various articles in this issue describe how people are dependent on the neighborhood they live in as regards their solidarity relations with each other and their coping strategies (Kronauer and Vogel, Engbersen and Staring, Ypeij and Steenbeek).

Not all neighborhoods provide the same possibilities for developing coping strategies. As the British research Pahl (1984) once noted, different neighborhoods have different getting-by potentials. A neighborhood's possibilities for poor households depend on the social composition of the population and the type of buildings there. Neighborhoods with a homogeneous population provide more possibilities for informal relations of solidarity among people in the same situation than neighborhoods with a more varied population. The kind of buildings there also plays a role. Because of the kind of buildings that are there, Europe's old city districts are thought to provide many more possibilities for developing coping strategies than the respectable but monotonous and mono-functional peripheral districts. There are more opportunities for earning a bit on the side in the old city districts, there are empty spaces that can be used

for informal businesses, there is a poor population that wants to earn something informally and a well-to-do group with the purchasing power to pay for their informal services and products. Thus a romanticized picture emerges of the old city districts where despite the reality of poverty and the lack of formal economic options, a web of informal and social relations and practices has developed that provides the residents of these marginalized districts with unprecedented possibilities.

This romanticized picture of the old city districts can be found at least as a hypothesis in various of the articles in this special issue, for example in Engbersen's metaphor of the urban palimpsest. Engbersen and Staring also describe the ample informal activities of poor marginalized Turkish households in the old districts of Rotterdam. This depiction of the old city district as location for the informal practices of poor households is however most explicit in the article by Kronauer and Vogel. They examine whether an old and multi-functional neighborhood in the German city of Hamburg is indeed more attractive to poor households than a post-war mono-functional residential area on the outskirts of the city. The surprising result is that this is not the case. The old city district does appear to be attractive to single unemployed people, for whom functioning on the margin of the urban economy has become a lifestyle as it were. For women and especially for single mothers though, the mono-functional suburb is more attractive because they rely less on the options for earning a bit informally, and far more on the informal support of relatives who live in the same neighborhood.

International migration as a coping strategy

International migration can also be viewed as an individual or household coping strategy to escape poverty and insecurity. In fact people confronted with economic insecurity have

been migrating throughout history (Benda-Beckman and Benda-Beckman 2000). Among pastoralists as well as other nomadic people, mobility was and still is an important adaptation to the conditions set by the natural environment. To the Fulbe in Mali for example, living in an arid region, as Bruijn argues, means constantly moving (Bruijn 2000: 137). Migration can become an important way for people living under less harsh conditions to improve their individual or household position. "Nothing can compare with the desire inherent in most men to 'better' themselves in material respects", Ravenstein wrote at the end of the nineteenth century (1889: 286). Ever since this pioneer in the field of international migration formulated his seven laws of migration, the central idea of explaining international migration on the basis of economics never disappeared from the academic discourse. Interpretations of labor migration are always more or less linked to poor economic conditions and people's desire to improve their position. However, as Castles and Miller argue, there is a growing understanding that migration - whether economic or not - can only be adequately understood in the perspective of global cultural, political, and social transformation processes (Castles and Miller 1993: 96; Massey et al. 1998).

In general, migration movements do not originate from the poorest Third World countries. In fact, research results indicate that international flows generally originate from countries with more intermediate wage levels. Moreover, immigrants are usually not the poorest people from these countries, but the ones with some resources (Portes 1995: 20). Migration flows are not the spontaneous outcomes of wage differentials or global economic inequalities (Portes and Rumbaut 1990: 224). Migration flows on a macro-level are the result of historical relations between the sending and receiving countries, whether of a political, economic or cultural nature. Economic restructuring results in the reorientation of the sending countries' economy and a dif-

fusion of Western consumer patterns in the peripheral countries (Portes and Rumbaut 1990). As traditional economies are restructured, households in the periphery are exposed to Western modes of production and consumer aspirations which can not be met, and international migration becomes one of the household strategies for meeting these newly perceived needs (Portes 1995: 21).

Although international labor migration is generally perceived as a consequence of poverty, insecurity and income inequality and a strategy for escaping poverty, it does not necessarily put an end to the poverty of the immigrants. Many of the labor immigrants from the Mediterranean region who settled in Western Europe from the 1960s onward have faced long-term unemployment in the past two decades. These *gastarbeiter* immigrants were among the first to suffer from the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s and their successors are still over-represented among the unemployed. In fact these immigrants are often among the poorest in their new homeland. As Engbersen and Staring argue in their article in this issue, many unemployed immigrants are disappointed and even regret moving, especially if they compare their situation to that of people who stayed behind and are doing as well or even better. Asylum seekers who have recently arrived are often highly educated, but face similar difficulties in finding a job and spend years learning the new language and attending training courses. Even if they succeed in finding a job on the formal labor market, they have often been dependent on social security for years and their position on the labor market is far below their capacities (Tillaart et al. 2000). Engbersen also illustrates this in his article with figures on the high percentage of immigrants in the poorest Dutch neighborhoods. The immigration project is not always as successful as it may seem in the first instance.

From the perspective of friends and relatives who remained in the home country, these immigrants did however escape insecurity and

poverty. Successful as they are, these immigrants are pressured by their friends and relatives in the home country to provide all kinds of assistance. To meet the expectations and maintain relations over long distances, many immigrants send presents and money to their relatives who remained behind. This international flow of gifts is typical of immigrants and can be a real burden for the poor. Snel notes that poverty is not only a matter of a low income, it is also related to consumer patterns and expenses. His conclusion is that poor immigrant households invest part of their modest budget in their relatives abroad, even to the extent of going heavily into debt. He interprets these 'foreign investments' as long-term informal opportunities in which formal social security plays no role (Snel 1998). On a more collective level, inequality at the village level increases between families with and without immigrant members, families that receive money and gifts from abroad and those that do not, families that can build modern houses and those that have to stay in their traditional homes, families that can buy farming machines and those that have to rent these machines from other villagers. As such, growing local inequalities as well as the positive impression made by returnees contribute strongly to further international chain migration, whether of a legal or irregular nature.

Transnational linkages

Massey et al. argue that "the conditions that initiate international movement may be quite different from those that perpetuate it across time and space. (...) New conditions that arise in the course of migration come to function as independent causes themselves" (Massey et al. 1993: 448). Among the most important new conditions are the social networks that connect immigrants with their countrymen and the people left behind. The grounding of social networks across national boundaries is one of the key notions amid the new conditions. In her article on family and personal networks in

migration, Boyd (1989) states that:

"social networks based on kinship, friendship and community ties are central components in migration system analysis. Social networks mediate between individual actors and larger structural forces. They link sending and receiving countries. And they explain the continuation of migration long after the original impetus for migration has ended" (Ibid.: 661).

Although social networks have long been recognized as motivating factor in the continuation of migration movements, the characteristics of these networks have changed as a result of recent processes of globalization. Perhaps the most important change in these social networks is their closeness. As a consequence of improved faster and cheaper transportation and communication on a global level, it has become much easier to maintain linkages and social relations across long distances and international borders. Whereas Polish peasants in the United States engaged in time-consuming correspondence with their relatives in Poland a century ago, nowadays cell phones, e-mail and the Internet create opportunities for real-time contact between immigrants and their relatives back home. Instead of the long sea journey to Ellis Island most European immigrants to the United States embarked upon until far into the 1950s, nowadays one can fly from the Old Continent to New York in less than eight hours. Depending on weather conditions, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the sea journey from Europe to America could last from one to three months and was often perilous. The introduction of the steamship reduced the journey around 1900 to less than ten days (Handlin 1951), but this still compares poorly with contemporary travel. Despite these technological improvements, one should not overestimate the value of modern travel. Many wanna-be immigrants and refugees are mainly confined to the informal services of smugglers and traffickers for their journey abroad. Not only do they have to pay

large sums of money, they often face the same kind of time-consuming and dangerous journey as their predecessors.

Improved communication and transportation options facilitate and promote the growth of transnational immigrant communities and shape opportunities for immigrants to maintain close ties with network members in other parts of the world (cf. Portes 2000). According to the anthropologists who problematized the subject, this means immigrants build social fields that link their country of origin and their country of settlement. They take actions, make decisions, feel concerns and develop identities in social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (e.g. Glick-Schiller et al. 1992). These transnational networks or transnational spaces are accompanied by specific claims for support and loyalty. Chain migration should also be viewed as part and parcel of these transnational networks, even if there are formal entry restrictions for Western countries (Espinosa 1997, Faist 1998, Staring 2001). In this issue, Hilary Silver examines how one immigrant group in the United States, Dominicans, established transnational intermediaries in one local context, i.e. Providence, Rhode Island. She convincingly describes how these intermediaries stimulated further migration to the city and in turn, developed local community institutions in the Dominican Republic and a number of American cities. These institutions reflect and promote sustained relations with the country of origin as well as immigrant incorporation in the host country.

Since the oil crises of the early 1970s, most Western European countries have adopted a restrictive migration policy. Contemporary migration flows to these countries from outside the European Union consist mainly of asylum seekers, refugees, family reunification and illegal labor immigrants. In *Controlling immigration*, Cornelius, Martin and Hollifield discuss state intervention and the control of international migration and contemporary migration patterns. The authors observe an in-

creasing similarity among industrialized, labor importing countries in the policy instruments chosen for controlling immigration and envision a greater gap between the goals of these immigration policies and their outcomes. Although industrialized countries increasingly try to control immigration by tightening entry restrictions, the authors argue that they have a hard time overcoming their internal economic interests and push pressures in the sending countries. These processes are accompanied by a sensitivity to public opinion on the consequences of the influx and settlement of immigrants for the identity and unity of the nation states (Cornelius, Martin and Hollifield 1994: 3-6). However, whereas the national level is characterized by restrictions and prohibitive rules, at the local level there is some space for illegal immigrants. The opportunities are sometimes formal and financially supported by local authorities such as the municipality. Sometimes these opportunities are created and maintained by professionals and there are local initiatives by private persons or charity agencies (Leun 2001). In his interesting article, Engbersen defines illegal immigrants as one of the most important exponents of urban marginality in the twenty-first century. One of his important conclusions is that illegal immigrants and the long-term unemployed constitute a heterogeneous group with access to different opportunity structures. Not every long-term unemployed person is socially excluded and not every illegal immigrant needs material help. For the latter, the existence of a loyal transnational community of co-ethnics with a well-established ethnic infrastructure and entrepreneurship, as in the case of the Turks, is of crucial importance (Staring 2001). Consequently, this makes the question of how illegal immigrants who lack social capital manage to survive all the more relevant for future research.

Notes

1. "Many social security recipients break the rules". Press release issued by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment on 31 January 2001. Cf. the letter from State Secretary Hoogervorst of Social Affairs and Employment to the Lower House of the Dutch Parliament on 31 January 2001 in which he presented the results of the study.
2. Cf. the press release on 31 January 2001.
3. The study was conducted in a period when Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was still provided in the United States. The AFDC was abolished during the Clinton Administration and replaced with the Personal Responsibility Act. The basic idea behind this new act is that at most, single mothers have a temporary right to a social security benefit, but have to support themselves. As Edin and Lein note, the personal responsibility of parents is "rather narrowly (defined) as the willingness to engage in wage-earning labor (and on the part of non-parents as the willingness to forgo childbearing until they could support their children on their earning)" (1997: 5). Nothing can be said yet about any similarity to the recent Dutch social security policy on single mothers.

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